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AUTHOR Sutton-Smith, Brian
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ABSTRACT

Challenging the use of schools for the preservation of selected traditional games, often in conjunction with competitive sports advocated by governments, this paper probes five issues. Are the traditional physical activities really worth preserving and, if so, why? Can such traditional activities actually be manipulated to meet expectations? Which traditional items should be selected for preservation? What kind of cultural identity is relevant to the modern world? Can schools or adult agencies effectively sustain or preserve a traditional physical activity, since children are taught to "play with" a tradition rather than to be traditional? It is concluded that where traditions are not a direct expression of the life of a people, they cannot be preserved in their earlier character. Furthermore, whereas physical activities in their earlier forms were directly related to earlier kinds of life, the present or future identity of children and adults is, in contrast, an increasingly symbolic and solitary one. Scholars should think clearly about what it is that they wish to preserve and who gains an advantage by such preservation, since what is preserved is a new performance culture suitable for an audience and television and no longer an uncontrived natural expression. (RH)

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THE FATE OF TRADITIONAL GAMES IN THE MODERN WORLD

Brian Sutton-Smith, University of Pennsylvania

Concluding discussion delivered at IIIrd Rainbow Week, International Symposium "Physical Activities and cultural identity of children and youths" Toulouse, France August 30th to September 6th, 1985.

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The majority of the papers in this conference present the view that the cultural identity of children and youth in the modern world is endangered by a potential or actual loss of traditional physical activities (including games, dances, initiation rites, motor activities, massage etc). While there is some limited advocacy of modern sports as a trans national language in which the young are more involved than anything else, in this conference this is a minority viewpoint (Yousef Fates, Algeria). On the otherhand a number of speakers believe that it is possible to use organized educational or recreational means to introduce a new cultural identity

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where one is said not to exist (Fanny Youkis, Belgium; Joseph Chittilapilly, India). Most, however, favor the use of schools to preserve traditional games, or to preserve some selected traditional games, perhaps in conjunction with the kind of competitive sports that are quite often advocated by the governments of their respective countries (Messieurs Andy Seward, Papua; Gabriel Diouf & Omar Thiandoum, Senegal; Hassan Joof, Gambia; Lassina Diarra, Ivory Coast; L. Achameesing, Mauritius; M. Hassan Ali, Djibouti). In addition contrasts are made occasionally in their papers between the authenticity of the traditional forms (Lamine [Senegal] M.Kabedi, [Zaire]), their exemplary moral status (Phillip Karamakuzhi, [India]), and their lamented stereotypic character of international sports (E. Lombo, Burkina Faso).

So the questions that I have set for myself and will attempt to answer are as follows:

1. Are the traditional physical activities really worth preserving and why is it that we want to do so ?

2.Can we actually manipulate these traditional activities to suit ourselves ?

3.Which traditional items should we select for preservation anyway?

4. What kind of cultural identity is relevant to the modern world in any case ?

5. Can schools or adult agencies actually do this effectively ?

Question 1. Are the traditional activities really worth preserving and why is that we want to do so ?

The first thing to note is the overwhelming twentieth century faith in play, games and sports. I hardly need call your attention to the relative neglect of play and sports in international attention during the past centuries and their pre-eminence in this century, as exemplified, for example, in the Olympics and in almost every sport from Soccer to Water Skiing here at Toulouse.. The same positive view is held in scholarly research within which every major theory of this century has contended that play is functional in one way or another whether the grounds given have been of an evolutionary, psychological or anthropological nature. All the great names in play: Huizinga, Piaget, Freud, Berlyne, Bateson, say the same. In addition there are major educational theories that also stress the values of play for children's learning from Froebel to Dewey.. And yet Tony Simon has shown it is hard to validate these claims. It is also a simple matter of animal observation or child observation that play is one of the most dangerous activities that children can undertake. Monkeys fall out of trees in games of chase. Modern street children die beneath automobiles in games of chase. The history and anthropology of play is replete with

examples which are violent, and cruel. Until this century the experience of pain and the infliction of pain seems to have been one of the main satisfactions of play. There are many Mid Eastern and Western societies in fact in which play has been either despised, banned of rigorously controlled. We are all familiar with the fate of dance and play under strictly religious regimes. We are familiar with the banning of games of chance and gambling in many countries throughout the past five hundred years. We are familiar with the many laws in European countries in the same period in which the upper classes attempted to ban those games of the folk which were noisy and destructive and encourage instead only those games which they believed contributed to the martial arts and made good soldiers.

All of this raises very serious questions about what we mean by traditional physical play activities. So many of these have been related to preparations for war and combat that we can hardly give them all a blanket approval. When not related to warfare as games of attack and defense they have most often been connected in some way or another with hunting kinds of activities as chase and escape. These are the two major categories of games world wide: Attack and defense; chase and escape. These activities are not always relevant to many modern children. In sum, given the idealization of play and games in the modern world there is a

tendency for us to talk rather simplistically about traditional pastimes as if they were virtuous simply because they were traditional. This is, I believe, a piece of romanticism originating as a reaction against industrialism, but perhaps useful also as a political response of disadvantaged aginst those who afflict them. Clearly there are many traditional games that are inconsistent with modern morality.

Question 2. Can we actually manipulate these traditional games to suit ourselves ?

Assuming that we have found those examples of tradition that we approve, are they in fact so easily manipulable. There is indeed the view in anthropology that the recreative phenomena of a society are its most "open" and manipulable area, although there is no rigorous test of the hypothesis. Actually, it more of an hypothesis relevant to the modern world than to the premodern world where what we call recreative activities were often sacred activities and obligatory activities and may not have been so easily tampered with. Still we do have many examples of such tampering. It is not difficult to argue that recreative forms or expressive forms provide a fulcrum for community conflict. They are sometimes at least one arena within which it is possible to give expression to many kinds of motives that cannot be so safely allowed in

other less controlled settings. Competition, arrogance, aggression and exhibitionism can be displayed here when they are not allowed elsewhere. More importantly different groups can use the phenomena as a part of their own struggles for power or for adequate self expression. The most obvious modern examples come from the usage made by subordinate groups of the games of their colonial super powers to demonstrate their own virtuosity. The role of rugby in the colonies of Wales, New Zealand and South Africa are a case in point. The role of Cricket in the West Indies, Pakistan, Australia and India are another example. And the immense importance of soccer to the struggling masses of the world is yet another example. In the first place, however, these team games were introduced to such subordinate groups as a way of assimilating them into the recreative modes of their conquerors. The games became themselves part of the rhetoric of power. The usage of approved sports throughout the Western World in the universal schooling as it eventuated in the past century carries that message clearly. And recently we have been given the powerful example of the way in which the ancient horse riding contest of Buzkashi from Afghanistan was used by local potentates to confirm both their position of power and their capacity to maintain orderly control. But recreations introduced from the top in order to convey such political authority have a tendency to get out of hand, as Mr. Andy Seward has shown

happened in the famous case of Trobriand Cricket which was introduced as an alternative to warfare and became almost completely transformed from the original decorous British game into a mimicry of warfare and local festival behavior. There are yet other examples when a game introduced from outside is used by some faction within the subordinate group to undermine the power of another faction for their own benefit as happened, for example, with Baseball when introduced to the American Pueblo.

The input of all this kind of evidence is that recreative spheres often are an arena for political contention either within the playing group or between groups of different status. The assumption,therefore, that we can do what we wish with traditional games is a naïve one. The very effort to conserve or select them for the future is some kind of a political statement. We are not simply placing relics in a museum we are trying to make a statement about the kind of society we regard as most desirable and about the habits of the groups of which we most approve within that society. In short some of us may indeed be able to manipulate games and dances in the societies of which we are a part, but this is not simply an act of preservation is is itself part of the rhetoric of power.

Question 3. Which traditional items should we select for preservation ?

The great historical shift in games at least is from societies which put a greater emphasis on collaborative play but often cruel (e. g. Eskimoes), to modern societies which put more emphasis on competitive, but ~~more~~ non punitive, play. This is a shift also from relatively more collective play to relatively more individualistic, even more solitary play. Modern Western children, e. g., spend the bulk of their playtime by themselves, on their own, with toys in their bedrooms, playrooms, or in front of a television set. In general anthropologically as one shifts focus from band societies, through chiefdoms, to the elementary political state and to archaic and modern civilizations those changes take place from collective to solitary play. In addition, the simpler the society the less often their is concern with outcomes or winning . The more often there is greater concern for solidarity expressed in games, as turn taking within the group. The more complex the society the more often there are teams in conflict with reversals of role or fate , with scoring, with points, and at the most intricate levels there is referees, score keepers, judges and high levels of intra team co-ordination. Strangely enough these differences are preserved in Western civilization in the continuing and traditional differences between

the play of girls and boys. Girls have preserved an order of relationship which is much older in human civilization as we know it than have boys. It is an order of relationships where there is greater concern for co-operation, turn taking, orderliness, rhythm, chanting, chance, determination of outcome, and confined spaces. The reason for these kinds of characteristics in band societies appears to be the necessity of emphasizing co-operation for small group survival. The continuance of these kinds of characteristics amongst women and girls, where it occurs (which is not everywhere), appears to have to do with their family oriented, nurturant roles. Girls have traditionally been more concerned with social coherence than males and their games seem to reflect that emphasis.

Not surprisingly with the development of the feminist movement in the West, there has come also THE NEW GAMES MOVEMENT, which emphasizes the importance of reducing the number of competitive games for adults and children, and of increasing large scale collaborative games. Whereas collaborative games have in the past been characteristic of small groups, it is the ingenuity of the New Game Movement to seek to extend these games to usage by hundreds of persons at a time. Their most famous games requires a circle of thousands of people to sit on the knees of those behind them at the same time. Naturally this is done with much laughter

and with many collapses into chaos.

Still the point I wish to make with this contrast is to ask, given this classic dichotomy within games, which shall we seek to preserve? The older collaborative forms or the newer competitive forms.Or even the newer collaborative forms ?

Perhaps we are helped by yet another kind of contrast. Typically in earlier pre city cultures, games were obligatory not optional. They were often part and parcel of sacred ritual activities, and were not thought of as separate from those activities as they are today. Even when not sacred they nevertheless were a part of communal participation. They were not the activity of specialized groups as they are today. Given that modern conditions of life often promote a sense of alienation and distance from others it is not surprising if we are inclined to idealize games of those earlier communal kinds. We are inclined to forget that we identify play and games, dance and the arts as forms of freedom, choice and euphoria; where they may not have these associations in the past. In consequence, although we may wish to use them today to maintain those prior communal association

or to restore those prior communal associations, when given that the whole world has shifted, the games etc cannot bear that burden alone.

In sum, in answer to question 3, when we go about choosing what we shall preserve we are making some kind of cultural or ideological choice. Typically when this has been done in the past the games chosen have been the more domesticated and those that are less dangerous. The choice of games for children to play today can be regarded as having more to do with the children's socialization than the preservation of tradition. What we call the "integrity of tradition" is really the moral integrity of our contemporary views of child rearing. Many would be horrified if we perpetuated the brutal, cruel, or erotic games of yesterday.

Question 4 . What kind of identity is relevant to the modern child in any case ?

Are we looking for a more collaborative identity or a more competitive one ? If we are looking for a more collaborative identity it can be argued that most of the games which have been identified as traditional in this conference areusually the games of males and they are quite competitive. They may not be international forms. They may be childlike forms, but they are still basically competitive. We have only one woman speaker here (Kelly-Byrne) advocating the traditional games of

girls. It has not been pointed out that traditionally women have often been more engaged in conversation around their chores as a kind of recreation than they have been engaged in games. But even more strikingly, why must we be advocating physical activity for its role in cultural identity. What is most striking about the modern world is the role of symbolic activity. The games that have increased the most over these past several thousand years seem to have been strategy games (as exemplified by Mancala, Weichei, or Chess, or their derivatives). These are games which are more likely to be found in more complex societies with social stratification technology etc. The games themselves seem, both to mimic and mock the strategies of class, warfare and possession. There has been a simply vast increase in such play in the booming toy market child culture of the past fifty years. It is already being said in the USA that the child who does not have access to video games on a home computer is a disadvantaged child. The identity of the child in the future will increasingly have to do with the manipulation of symbols and information using or being familiar with computers. It is also said that the child who is not skilful in solitary and imaginative ways is a disadvantaged child. The imagination once harnessed to the mnemonics of oral culture,is in literate societies a much more wayward thing which expresses itself in individualized art forms such as novels and in

technological inventions. In addition it has been argued that the toy culture of the modern city child is a system for preparing him or her in that solitariness which is a part of the modern information society and essential for success within it, whether as an academic,an inventor, a computer terminal operator. It has been remarked that Einstein did not invent relativity in a crowd.

If this kind of solitary-complex-symbolic-strategic-achieving cultural identity is the future, then what are we doing advocating kinds of physical activity that have more to do with earlier modes of human adaptation? A cultural identity which is to be preserved by traditional games would, in these terms, be simply irrelevant to the modern world.

Question 5. Can the schools or adult agencies actually do this effectively ?

Even assuming we have developed a clear idea of the physical activity which we wish to sustain how do we know that schools can do this ? There is plenty of data to show that the physical games that survive in schools tend to be the more peaceful ones, the others being supplanted by the sports and athletics organized by adults. When folk dances or folksongs or folkgames are introduced newly by teachers they do not often get taken up

by the children spontaneously. They are just a part of physical education lessons or another modern specialization as Ms. N. Sor demonstrated. There are some exceptions to this where games taught by teachers have survived in childhood play but they are relatively infrequent.In general also, traditional pastimes are likely to flourish more where the children are relatively poorer, isolated, or females. Perhaps worse than any of this; when games are given to children in order to familiarize them with traditional ways, then what is also being conveyed is that they are only suitable for children. Once children are put into schools and childhood is made strictly separate from adult labor in this way, then what children do becomes known as childish. By giving tradition to children you make it childlike. You do not preserve it as it was, you create new and childlike forms. What belongs only to childhood has been treated as secondary in the modern world.

I do not mean to argue that,therefore ,these traditions should not be taught to children; I do mean to argue that these traditions then become a part of literate society rather than of oral society. They are fundamentally changed and specialized by this new usage. Their spontaneous expression of group life and tradition is terminated. The very teaching is itself a symptom of the kind of modern specialized use of play that has been fundamental in the destruction of the older traditions. The children are

taught to "play with" the traditions rather than to be traditional. The difference is enormous.

These distinctions become even clearer if we think of the many agencies of modern life that have set up their own organizations to collect, restore, perpetuate or preserve traditional forms of song, dance, art or play. What has happened in these many societies whether sponsored privately or by modern governments, as is increasingly the case, is that this or that ethnic heritage is treated with new respect, but is totally transformed into a modern kind of performance. The performances live on in the midst of complex modern life as one kind of specialization. I happen to live by Valley Forge where George Washington brought the first American Army through a long hard winter to go on and fight successfully for their independence. What always amazes me are the hundreds of volunteers who buy or make their own replicas of the army costumes worn by Washington's men two hundred years ago, and who during cold and icy winters live for several nights in the same small wooden huts once occupied by those early soldiers. And who go forth marching around the park with the drums and fifes playing carrying their old fashioned rifles and being a living museum of earlier times. They are playing at being in history and from them the rest of us as spectators gain a refreshment of

that sense of cultural identity which we wish to preserve in the modern world. Their self-conscious play with images has replaced the play of the collective.

Conclusion

The burden of my paper is that where traditions are not a direct expression of the life of the people they cannot be preserved in their earlier character. Furthermore physical activities in their earlier forms were directly related to earlier kinds of life. The present or future identity of all of us, children and adults is an increasingly symbolic and solitary one.

Nevertheless, the past lives on in specialized ways which can bring a new if limited appreciation of some of its aspects. We need not to have our perception blurred by nostalgia for that past, nor by idealization of play in general. But need to remember that play and games and other recreative forms appear always to have been used as a part of the rhetoric of political and national life, as the recent examples of first the Americans and then the Russians not going to the Olympics has shown us. We are probably lucky that they took those alternatives to express their dissatisfactions. There are worse alternatives. What I urge of the

participants in this conference, therefore, is that they think clearly about what it is that they wish to preserve and who it is that gains an advantage by this kind of preservation seeing what is preserved is a new performance culture suitable for audiences and television, no longer an uncontrived natural expression. Why are some items selected and others rejected. And do we want our traditions to suffer the fate that the inevitably must in the hands of children?

But finally, let me now put aside the note of pessimism that runs through my address and finish on a more optimistic note. Let us, for the moment, also put aside the massive fact that most modern countries have retained their traditional plays only in their folklore libraries or in highly specialized groups of folk dancers or folk singers or for specialized commercial or political occasions: Let us consider instead first: The very enthusiasm of the present group. Secondly: The worldwide desire in so many countries to free the very young from the constraining consequences of too early sports specialization. And thirdly: The desire so clearly evoked by Monsieur Lemarchand and the Rainbow Days to have children first experience a wide variety of plays from the broader game curriculum of mankind still acceptable in this century. Fourthly: Consider the present international opportunity to develop such a curriculum from the traditional offerings of the participant groups here present.

Fifthly: Consider that Third World members of this group are still mOore in touch with their own game traditions and may have so much more reason to wish to preserve them than did the industrial nations when their play traditions began to die out one hundred years ago. Sixthly: Consider further than play is always a fulcrum of human contention. Then there is no reason to assume that by binding together to preserve elements of the traditonal play curriculums of different countries, we cannot change the particular pessimistic course of history which I have outlined. The welfare of all young children as well as the distinctive cultural identities of separate groups can all be assisted by the development of an active exchange of game performances amongst the members. A United Nations of play and games for children is a distinct possibility. It would be supported by the International Playground Association and by a majority of early childhood educators throughout the world. But it cannot occur without it becoming a powerful international rhetoric on behalf of all children everywhere. It will not happen spontaneously. Traditional games can preserve themselves only by isolation from modern circumstances, unless, as Rainbow Days implies, they become a political advocacy on behalf of children. We owe this to children because play is one of the last <u>carnivals</u> we have left in the cultural fragmentations of modern life.